

Editorial

Volunteerism and Professional Development

Danial E. Baker, PharmD, FASHP, FASCP*

In this age, where it seems that everyone is spending their time working, commuting to work or the kids' or grandchildren's activities, exercising, and multitasking between several of these activities, we all should occasionally stop and ask whether we are doing enough in the areas of personal and professional development. When we think about professional development and growth, it is often in terms of continuing education, job-related skills, or job responsibilities, but we don't think about volunteerism. You may think of volunteerism as one more thing you need to juggle. But volunteerism can provide personal growth, satisfaction, learning, development of new skill sets, and professional development, and it can create a new group of friends or colleagues.

Let's explore a few of the options for volunteerism, other than the obvious activities with service organizations (eg, Lions Club, Rotary), churches, missions, schools, and community services (eg, food banks, Meals on Wheels, fire departments, clean-up day, trail maintenance, blood drives, and health fairs).

Have you ever thought of serving as a peer reviewer for a professional publication, a preceptor for pharmacy students, or a committee member or officer in a pharmacy organization, or being involved with public health initiatives or emergency services? These are essential activities for the profession and provide opportunities for growth, networking, and personal development. Peer reviewing for professional publications can be done by any practitioner who wants to spend some time reading, evaluating, and providing feedback to authors and publishers while influencing the quality of what is published in the professional literature. You can find a mentor who would be willing to show you how to do this and provide some guidance or go online and read the numerous articles on this subject. It is especially rewarding to take a document that someone else has created and provide feedback; you can read the comments made by the other peer reviewers and

contrast them to what you said about the manuscript. If the manuscript has been revised based on the peer review, you can read it again to see how the authors addressed the issues and provide more feedback to the author(s) and publisher. When you finally see the paper in print, you'll know that you had an impact on its development and the profession.

Serving as a preceptor for pharmacy students is rewarding and challenging. Many of us do it to give something back ("paying it forward") to our profession, especially since someone did it for us earlier in our careers; whereas others do it because the students help to keep them fresh, informed of new developments and trends, and challenged. One of the biggest challenges of being a preceptor is adjusting to the different personality types and levels of preparedness for life and the profession among students and the inability to select which student will be assigned to your practice site. But some of the individuals that you mentor will become lifelong colleagues or friends after this experience. If this type of activity does not fit your practice, you could become involved with a pharmacy school or college as an advisor, recruiter, advocate, alumni coordinator, or student mentor.

Professional associations (eg, local, state, and national pharmacy organizations) always need volunteers. Volunteer activities can range from serving as a moderator for a continuing education session to being an officer of the organization. They could involve being a committee member, serving as committee chair, acting as a liaison to another professional organization or governmental agency, visiting with legislators, reviewing submissions for meeting posters, judging meeting posters, facilitating a discussion group at a convention, or giving a presentation at the organization's annual meeting. Another avenue of service could be the United States Pharmacopeia (USP). Did you know that the USP has a 195-year history of volunteerism by health care professionals and scientists and the majority of the monographs and policies of the USP are developed

*Director, Drug Information Center, College of Pharmacy, Washington State University Spokane

by volunteers? All of these organizations offer great opportunities to network with other professionals.

Public health initiatives and emergency services are other avenues for volunteerism. Does your public health department provide influenza vaccine drives and does your state allow pharmacists to give vaccines? If so, you can influence the health of your community and prompt the role of pharmacy in public health. You could get involved with the Red Cross to provide help during disasters. Some areas in the United States are starting to include pharmacists as members of the emergency response team within local public health and emergency response agencies. Some members of our profession choose to become first responders so they can work with rural ambulance services, wilderness first aid programs, ski patrols, summer camps, and scouting programs.

All of these are worthwhile activities, but I do have a concern. Lately, when I look around during my volunteer activities, I see more individuals who have some gray in their hair and not many of the younger members of the profession. Several of these organizations have recently included discussion topics to meetings or ad hoc committees to look at ways to encourage and develop the next generation of volunteers. Throughout my career, I have done a number of volunteer activities and have benefited from each along the way. I started down this path a long time ago partly because of my parents, but also because I was encouraged by my mentors to become involved. Yes, it can be difficult to fit it all in; but in the end, it has always been worth it and I will be forever grateful to my mentors for their advice and encouragement. ■